God's Will for the Salvation of Humanity

(Genesis 12:1–3)

March 20, 2022

Something unusual has been happening in Japan. The government quickly announced it would accept Ukrainian refugees fleeing war, and local governments as well as private citizens began moving to welcome them. In parliament, both ruling and opposition parties united in their call: "Help the Ukrainians! Receive the refugees!" For decades, Japan had been reluctant to admit refugees, even as its population shrank and its people grew older. Yet with Ukraine, everything changed "in an instant."

At first glance, this may seem like progress. But behind it, I cannot help but sense the weight of racial prejudice.

The tragedy in Ukraine has drawn worldwide attention, not simply because it is such a terrible disaster. The world has seen many tragedies—some even greater in scale. Nuclear weapons are indeed part of the concern, but I suspect the deeper reason is that the victims are Europeans, and not southern Europeans with darker skin, but those with pale skin, blond hair, and blue eyes.

Even in today's America, the group known as WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants) are often regarded as the highest racial class. Ukrainians do not belong to the WASP category, but they are frequently perceived as "a cultured people," akin to northern Europeans. In reality, Ukraine's democracy and human rights are still fragile. Yet many Japanese imagine Ukrainians as highly educated, beautiful people from a refined country.

Contrast this with Japan's response to refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Syria, or the millions slaughtered in Africa's genocides. Rarely has Japan opened its doors. Even now, foreign detainees in immigration centers suffer inhuman conditions—one Sri Lankan woman even died under such treatment. Will Ukrainians in Japan be spared such hardship? It is far from certain.

And yet, historically, the Japanese people have sometimes acted with compassion across racial lines. During the wartime alliance with Germany, it was not only Chiune Sugihara but also General Kiichiro Higuchi who helped save Jews, even defended by Hideki Tojo himself. Poland's war orphans were received into Japan when no other nation would take them. When a Turkish naval vessel sank off the coast of Kushimoto in the 19th century, local fishermen risked their lives to rescue survivors—a story still taught in Turkish schools. Nearly a century later, Turkey repaid that kindness by rescuing stranded Japanese citizens during the Iran-Iraq war.

Japan also modernized Korea and Taiwan when they were impoverished under foreign domination, building schools, roads, and industries. Today, Japan continues to pour out funds through ODA, even to nations that once opposed it. At times, our nation seems almost too generous, yet I secretly rejoice to be part of such a people.

Still, racism remains deeply rooted here. It may not be as blatant as in the United States, but the Ukraine crisis revealed how selective our compassion can be.

The Bible knows nothing of racial discrimination. God's heart is for every tribe and nation to be blessed. Israel was chosen not because it was superior, but to be the vessel through which blessing would reach the world. Sadly, Israel mistook this calling as a privilege, and later Western Christians repeated the same error—using their religion and culture to look down on others.

But God's will is different. From the beginning, Japanese, Koreans, Muslims, and all peoples were included in his plan of salvation. We are not receiving "leftovers" of grace; we were part of God's purpose from the start.

Meanwhile, today's media paints war in black-and-white terms—Putin as 300% evil, Ukraine and NATO as pure victims. Yet history shows us that in war, every side spreads lies. America did so at Pearl Harbor, in the Gulf of Tonkin, and in Iraq. Wars are waged on misinformation. Putin too feels cornered, much like Japan did before World War II when its supply lines were cut.

The world is complex. There is no absolute good or absolute evil among nations. Our judgments are limited, our information uncertain. That is why we must refrain from revenge and entrust all things to God.

As Christians, our role is to pray: for Ukrainians, for Russians deceived by propaganda, for all who suffer discrimination. We pray that prejudice may be removed from our own hearts. And above all, we entrust ourselves to the One who rules history. God delays the end of this broken world so that more people may yet receive eternal life.